

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

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GRETCHEN.

By the Author of "Dame Durden," "My Lord Conciit,"
"Darby and Joan," "Corinna," etc.

BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I. "FORGIVEN!"

As she uttered his name, Adrian Lyle sprang to his feet, white as death and trembling as the weakest woman might have trembled. He was by her side; her hands were prisoned in his clasp; his eyes—Heaven knows what she might have seen in his eyes, as for one fleeting second the veil was lifted—and his soul spoke out to hers without warning or premeditation.

What she saw seemed to arrest all further speech. The change in herself had not struck home to her recovered consciousness with so great a sense of wonder as the change in him. All the pain and weariness; all the anxious hours; all those sleepless nights and hopeless days, had left marks indelible for all time; and he, who had borne the strain so long in its very hopelessness, now felt endurance snap like a frail thread beneath the pity of her glance and the innocent questionings of the childish lips.

She shuddered, and drew her hands from his with sudden, passionate force, and, covering her face from sight, cried brokenly to him once more to tell her what had happened.

"There is a dark, thick cloud," she moaned, "between me and all memory. I have been ill, have I not?—but before that there was something——"

Adrian Lyle turned aside. Not in any words could he tell what had happened; not by any power of will could he have

put that hateful story of shame and betrayal before her, as the terrible reality he knew it to be.

He beckoned to the pale and trembling woman who was looking on in silence and anguish—all mingled with a terrible and scarce-realised joy—at this scene.

"You tell her," he said in a low and broken whisper; "I cannot." And he went swiftly away from their presence—feeling that on the sacredness of such re-union he dared not look.

How long a time had passed, or how short? What passion of prayer and thanksgiving had left his lips? Dimly he knew he had groped his way to his own room and fallen on his knees without a cry or sound—the very force of emotion was too intense for outward expression.

But, at last, his brain seemed to clear; the stifling throbs of pulse and heart were less painful. He staggered to his feet and looked around him—a cold sweat upon his brow, his tall frame shaking like a leaf.

"Oh," he cried in his heart, "I did not think it would have been so hard, or that I was such a coward. I have not got over it; it is no whit easier than it was when—when I left her roof. And she, poor child—poor, little, forsaken Gretchen—how little she guesses!"

He threw himself on the bed by which he had been kneeling, his face hidden on his folded arms. The bitter loneliness of his life, the hardship of long repression, came home to him with added force now.

"He will come home," he said to himself, "and she will forgive him, and the past will be forgotten. She may be happy yet. It is in his power to make her so, and I can only say—Heaven's will be done. Happiness is not for me!"

But, though he said it, he could not take the hard truth home to his heart; could not, in the force, and strength, and passionate craving of manhood, resign himself coldly to the self-abnegation which his words breathed.

How he could have loved her! nay, why deceive himself?—how he did love her!—how happy he would have made her! And yet Fate had given her to a coward and a traitor, in whom she saw the ideal of her girlhood's dreams and the lover of her innocent youth.

Adrian Lyle had had many dark hours in his life, but not one so dark as this; through deep and bitter waters did his soul pass, well-nigh overwhelmed by their depth and blackness. Was this life, this terrible strain on mental and physical forces? Must it be all sacrifice, all struggle, and then the darkness and silence of eternal night?

At this juncture thought seemed to cease. A strange lull and calm came over him. His brain throbbed less painfully; the laboured beating of his heart grew slow and quiet; the strained and fevered look died out of his eyes.

He closed his eyes and lay there for some moments longer, thankful for the lull that had followed that storm of awakened feeling, considering whether the duties of life might not yet be powerful enough to claim his services, to enchain his attention, and to fill his heart, though actual and personal happiness were denied him.

Some half hour later a little note was brought to him. It contained a few lines in German, written by Anna von Waldstein.

"She knows me—she forgives me—we are happy. Oh, my friend, thank Heaven for us! I feel that I am not worthy to, do so. Come to me this evening, and I will tell you our plans.

"ANNA VON WALDSTEIN."

He read it, then folded it up, and slowly put it away.

"I must act now," he said; "there will be time enough presently for dreams."

Alexis Kenyon had kept long vigil by her father's side before, at last, he opened his eyes and saw her. It seemed to her that, in that first memory of recognition, there was something of terror and apprehension replacing the old idolised tenderness.

She bent over him, all her pride and languor gone now, only an infinite compassion for the present, an intense remorse for

the past, living in her heart and breathing in her soothing and pitiful words.

Yet her presence seemed to distress him; and, when at his imperative signs they placed paper and pencil before him once again, he wrote, "Bring Adrian Lyle."

When that message came, the young clergyman smiled bitterly.

"I am not even to have the luxury of solitude," he thought to himself; but even as he thought it, he felt ashamed of the momentary selfishness it embodied.

A few moments later he was in that dark and mournful room once more—that room where the flower-like beauty and indolence of Alexis Kenyon looked to him so strangely out of place.

Sir Roy's eyes brightened as they rested on Adrian Lyle.

He took the pencil once again, and traced on the sheet of paper before him one word, "Anna."

Adrian Lyle looked at it in amazement. "Anna"? He thought of Anna von Waldstein, but it seemed impossible that Sir Roy should want to see her. He looked doubtfully at the sick man. There was no mistaking the almost frenzied eagerness of that beseeching look.

"Do you mean," he asked, "Madame von Waldstein?"

Sir Roy's lips moved convulsively; then underneath the name he wrote, "alone."

"You wish," asked Adrian Lyle, "to see her alone?"

"Yes, yes," muttered the trembling lips. More and more bewildered Adrian Lyle turned to Alexis.

"Your father," he said, "wishes to see a lady staying in this hotel, and to see her alone. That is what he has conveyed to me. Shall I bring her?"

"What is her name?" asked Alexis.

"Do you know her?"

"Yes," he said gravely. "I know her, but I was not aware that your father did."

"You are sure," she asked, "that you have not misunderstood him?"

Adrian Lyle looked again at the agitated face, the agonised entreaty of the watching eyes.

"I am sure," he said, "that I have not. And though we may not understand his motives, I think we must humour them."

"Very well," said the girl proudly. "He seems to have every confidence in you. I will go into the next room with the nurse, until this mysterious interview is over."

She withdrew at once, and Adrian Lyle went on his errand.

Anna von Waldstein was as much astonished as himself on receiving the message. The name was unknown to her, save through its relationship to Neale Kenyon; but feeling assured that it must concern Gretchen, she accompanied Adrian at once.

"The child is asleep," she said softly, as they passed along the carpeted corridor. "I persuaded her to go to bed again. She is so weak and frail, and all her strength seems gone. All that has happened is just like a dream to her; but her mind is as clear and sensible now as ever it was."

"Thank Heaven for that," said Adrian Lyle solemnly. "It is like a miracle."

"I shall thank Heaven," she said humbly, "every hour I live for such a friend as you."

"I!"—and the blood came in a flame to his pale and haggard face. "Oh, no. You must not say that. I have done nothing but my duty. Indeed I wish no thanks."

"I know that," she said, and there were tears in the beautiful, proud eyes. "And I know what 'duty' has cost you. Her eyes are blinded by sorrow; but mine——"

He laid his hand upon her arm with a gesture of entreaty.

"If you are, indeed, a friend," he said brokenly, "say no more. Let me keep my miserable secret to myself to my life's end."

Then he opened the door by which they stood, and the nurse passed out, and he led Anna von Waldstein to the side of that changed and shattered wreck of humanity whose summons had seemed so inexplicable a thing.

"Don't go," she said hoarsely, and a shudder of terror shook her frame.

Adrian Lyle looked at the sick man.

"Shall I leave you?" he asked.

There was an imperative sign in the negative.

He turned to the shocked and trembling woman.

"He can understand what you say, but he can only write his answers. Here are pencil and paper. I will retire beyond earshot; if you want me, you can call."

He went to the farthest window and stood there looking out at the street below. The faint murmur of the woman's voice; the hoarse, harsh sounds of the sick man's,

came to his ear from time to time. Then a rustling of paper, a sudden death-like silence, and, following it, a low cry of horror so intense that instinctively Adrian Lyle turned towards the bed, and his startled eyes beheld the woman sway suddenly forwards, the paper crushed to her heart; her voice moaning out in piteous accents that it could not be true; anything, anything but that. Had Heaven not punished her enough?

He sprang forwards, then paused, arrested by the change in the sick man's face, by the terrible convulsive workings of the features; the hoarse and almost unintelligible sounds issuing from the white and quivering lips.

"Our child!" that was what they cried; "our child! And I the instrument in God's dread hand to bring her young head to the dust of shame. Anna—say you forgive—say——"

There was no time for further entreaty. No time, and in very truth no need, for the poor changed face was hidden on a woman's breast, and the clasp of tender and forgiving arms were round that shattered wreck of manhood, and, amidst the passion of her sobs, a broken voice wailed out that the past was all forgotten, and every bitter memory washed away in pity; that the heart on which he leaned had never ceased to love him, and never would; that the dark road so long trodden by those proud and haughty feet was fairer than any path of peace, since it had brought her to his side again; and, so with tears, and sighs, and broken words those two hearts made their peace, and all their history grew plain; and, if sorrow and remorse closed in that closing life, it yet left it hushed, and calmed, and soothed by the tenderest forgiveness for which man had ever sued, and ever suffering womanhood had granted.

Adrian Lyle moved softly back to his post by the distant window. Something was murmuring in his ear; a voice of strange purpose—over and over again like the refrain of a haunting song came its broken words.

"The sins of the fathers—the sins of the fathers——"

CHAPTER II.

"NEITHER DO I CONDEMN THEE."

AT sunset that day Sir Roy Kenyon died.

Adrian Lyle held his secret in his keep-

ing; but he was little likely to betray it to any living creature, least of all to the sorrow-stricken girl, who found herself alone and unprotected in this first trial of her life.

It struck him as somewhat strange that he should have three women dependent on him at the same time, and that all were individually linked to the dead man's memory by just one act of folly and guilt in his past life.

When, at Anna von Waldestein's request he went to her rooms that evening, he learnt more fully and completely the circumstances of that past which had had such brief existence—foreshadowed such terrible consequences.

Woman-like, she now had naught but excuse and extenuation for the selfishness which had wrecked her own young life. She had forgiven him—she, who alone held the right to blame or accuse! She had loved him blindly and passionately—she had forsaken all others for him; but she had not made him happy. She was proud, wilful, exacting. The dream had been too wild and sweet not to have a sudden and bitter awakening. They drifted apart in spirit long before the actual rupture came. Duty called him to his own home and his own land; she deemed herself deserted and became unreasonable. Hard and cruel words were spoken, words hard to forget, and bearing bitter fruit. Then came the illness that brought her well-nigh to the gates of death, and then that desperate resolve which gave her back her place in the world at a cost she little thought of then.

All this she poured out to Adrian Lyle's ear in an agony of remorse and humiliation; all this he heard in that character of priest which made such confession sacred, in that sympathy of manhood which was strong enough and brave enough to counsel and help, even though his own heart was wrung with suffering and despair.

"I must go away from here," she said at last, when her pitiful tale was ended, and her tears had ceased to flow, "I and my child. She will never leave me now; we will live for each other in some place where our history is unknown, where peace and rest may yet be found. I could not bear to look upon his child and know that mine is an outcast, and must never know her father's name——"

Adrian Lyle started.

"Gretchen is scarcely seventeen, is she?" he asked. "If so, the other daughter——"

"I know," she said, and turned her face aside: "I know it to-day for the first time. He was not free; he could not have married me even had the laws of my country been less hard. But he was so unhappy, and I loved him as well as any wife could have done. Only I could not content him. I think that I tried him too much for content. Well, I have had my punishment."

Ay, that she had. If ever sin might be expiated by suffering, surely there was hope in Heaven for this poor sinner, who repented—repented in very dust and ashes of humiliation. And Adrian Lyle, listening to her story, and looking on her face, could say not one harsh word.

Let who will blame him—a Christian priest, lending ear of compassion and not of condemnation, to such guilt as this; thinking it no wrong to give hand and trust and fellowship to this sorely-tried and erring sister, saying only, "Neither do I condemn thee—go and sin no more."

The march of events was still rapid for Adrian Lyle. All the melancholy arrangements for the removal of Sir Roy's remains to the Abbey had to be performed, as Alexis wished the funeral to take place there. Lawyers had to be written to, friends and relations informed, and the one woman who had loved him best of all was the only one who dared not approach, or give any signs of remembrance, save the cross of white lilies which was placed upon his breast by Adrian Lyle's hands.

Gretchen was still so weak and helpless that removal was out of the question. Her mother watched her in an agony of dread in no way lessened by the grave looks and evasive answers of the medical man whom Adrian Lyle had called in.

It was with a very heavy heart that he accompanied Alexis Kenyon on that melancholy journey homewards. The task in itself was distasteful, leaving out of the question the circumstances under which he had left. But the girl could not travel alone with that melancholy burden, and he felt that he must carry still further his principles of self-denial.

He left Alexis at the Abbey, where Lady Breresford was already installed, and with a sigh of relief took his way to his old lodging near the church.

The dusk was drawing rapidly on as he walked swiftly down the avenue, and, branching off, took a short cut that led through the park to the village. His feet

made no sound on the damp and sodden earth, and as he moved under the dark boughs his figure was scarcely distinguishable. So it was that, coming suddenly face to face with another figure, advancing from the opposite direction, both stopped in mutual curiosity—a curiosity that, on Adrian Lyle's part, was soon satisfied, for he made but one rapid stride, and had seized the man in a grip of iron.

"So, my friend," he exclaimed triumphantly, "we have met again, have we? Good. You will now have the kindness to give me certain information of which I stand in need, and that without delay, or——"

"Or what, Signor Priest?" asked Bari, scoffingly. "I know your English laws. I am not to be threatened with impunity. I know what is law for assault. What is your intention then?"

"My intention," said Adrian Lyle, his hand closing more firmly on the man's collar, "is to know the true reason for your spite against me; then the motives that have led you to betray Mr. Kenyon to his uncle; and what made you vent your fiendish malignity on the unfortunate girl whom, in conjunction with your master, you so skilfully deceived?"

"And if I refuse to answer the Signor's questions?" demanded Bari with a sneer.

"I shall find means to make you," said Adrian Lyle calmly. "When I first saw your face in Venice, it brought back some memory to my mind, which then I was not able to define very clearly; but I have considered the matter since, and it has occurred to me that ten years ago in Oxford a certain Baptiste Leoni had made himself unpleasantly notorious by reason of——"

"Monsieur," interrupted the man in a changed and terrified voice, "there is no need to say more. I will give you the information you desire."

"Ah," said Adrian Lyle quietly, as he looked down at the shrinking, ashy face, "I thought we should come to terms before long. So the sword still hangs over your head, my friend, changed as is your name and appearance. You are scarcely wise, then, to set foot in England, even though so long a time has passed. But to business. While in the pay of Mr. Kenyon as his servant, you conveyed private information to his uncle, Sir Roy, of his conduct? Is it not so?"

"Yes," answered Bari sulkily.

"The details, however," continued Adrian Lyle, "were not always strictly correct.

But let that pass. Why did you spy on the nephew for the purpose of supplying the uncle with information?"

"Why?" repeated the man — "mais, ma foi, why? Monsieur might know the reason without asking. It was to my advantage."

"And was it," asked his interrogator, "to your advantage to assist in the disgraceful project by which an innocent child was ruined?"

"I was commissioned by Sir Roy to see that his nephew got into no entanglement — serious, that is to say. It was understood that he was to marry Miss Kenyon, and I did my duty accordingly."

"Your duty! Scoundrel, thief, spy that you are! How dare you pollute that word by your interpretation? I see your motives clearly enough now. You were in the pay of both; and you played the one against the other. Well, one paymaster has failed you—Sir Roy Kenyon is dead; and, before his nephew takes his place here, I warn you that he shall hear from my lips the whole of your double-dealing. We will see then what you will gain in the future. Miss Kenyon knows everything, and your master's secret has been published to the world at large in this recent trial. You have played your cards badly after all; and, if you are on your way to the Abbey now, I give you warning that you will be turned from the door ignominiously. Your plot against myself is clear enough; you sent me to Mrs. Kenyon's on a false errand, in order to——"

"Mrs. Kenyon!" cried Bari, in a sudden rage and fury which got the better of his cowardice. "Ha, ha! a fine Mrs. she. Breaking her vows, leaving her home at voice of the first man who asks her. My faith, yes. She to be a victim! Why, if not Mr. Kenyon, it would have been another. It was in her; she is of her mother's blood! Oh, a fine innocent, yes——"

"You scoundrel!" muttered Adrian Lyle hoarsely, "don't dare breathe a word against her, as you value your life! You forget that I know you; a word from me, and that old crime may still be brought home. If I show you mercy, it is not that you deserve it, but simply to spare pain to others. But listen: you shall take yourself out of England without delay; you shall swear never to molest or importune Miss Kenyon or the lady, who in my eyes, has every right to be considered your master's wife. If you fail to promise

this or to fulfil it, I shall give the police that hint which once might have been so useful. You best know what you have to fear from revelations of your past."

Again that grey, hard look came over Bari's face. His eyes flashed hatred, black and bitter as his own heart, at the noble face and form that towered above him. For a moment he was silent, balancing in his mind the contending advantages of defiance or submission. The sting of truth in Adrian Lyle's words made him doubly furious. He had indeed played his cards badly. In his anxiety to reap the rich harvests thrown in his way, he had thought to make the young clergyman but a tool for his own skill to fashion and to use. Instead of that, he had to acknowledge himself beaten off the field. The very air he breathed seemed to narrow and contract about him; the long-hidden terrors of a guilty past sprang back to life, and bade him be cautious ere he defied his antagonist now. He drew a deep breath—he made one last effort at assertion.

"I suppose," he said, "that you will make it worth my while if I give the promise."

The suggestion seemed to rouse Adrian Lyle to such fury as the man could scarcely credit. His face flushed; his eyes grew black with wrath. The hand which still retained its hold on Bari's collar shook him to and fro in a sudden impulse of passion.

"Cur and cheat that you are," he cried between his set teeth, "never one furthering of mine shall bribe you to that which justice demands as a right. Take your ill-gotten gains and rid this country of your presence before another sun has set, or by the might of Heaven above you shall repent the hour you refused my mercy."

The man raised his chill and bloodless face to the lowering sky.

"Mercy!" he echoed in a strange and far-off voice. "The mercy of a priest? Ha! ha! it's the first time I have heard of it."

"Take care," said Adrian Lyle, releasing him and pointing straight down the dark and sombre path, "that it is not the last. There lies your way, take it. I pray that I may never see your face again."

Bari turned, and, like a beaten hound, slunk away, cringing out of sight amidst the falling shadows; and Adrian Lyle—his breast heaving with stormy passion, all the loyalty, and strength, and uprightness of his nature in revolt against this miserable traitor—stood there still, doing battle with himself and the feelings

that this man always roused, feelings which he told himself were less temperate and forbearing than his office demanded, but not inexcusable in face of the provocation received.

"And there is still another," he thought in his heart, as he remembered that even now Neale Kenyon's face might be set homewards. "Heaven give me strength and patience. The hardest trial of my life must soon be met."

CHRONICLES OF THE WELSH COUNTIES.

BRECKNOCK AND GLAMORGAN.

IN the modern counties of Brecknock and Glamorgan it is easy to recognise the old Welsh districts of Brycheiniog and Morganwg, each of which had its petty Prince, subject nominally to the Prince of South Wales. The town of Brecon, and the valley of the Usk in which it lies, may represent for us the whole county; for, excepting the pretty little town of Crickhowel, there is no other place of importance within the shire bounds. Crickhowel is Craig Howel, so called from a rock on which Howel, a Prince of Gwent, established a fortified post, when he harried the lands of the Prince of Brycheiniog.

The ancient annals of Wales are one long-continued chronicle of such harryings and plunderings, of internecine wars, of sudden forays, and of interminable feuds, which there was no strong central power to repress.

The Welsh built no towns, and hated the restraints of walled enclosures; and the strong feudal castles which the Normans built at every point of vantage, were to them so many monuments of a hated and an alien domination.

The Palace of the Prince of Brycheiniog was but a wattled booth, which might have been built in a day, and yet its arrangements were regulated by a highly complicated code. The high Court of the Prince was held on the turf of a grassy bank, the Prince's chief privilege being that he might sit with his back to the sun; but the laws he administered were well settled and just; compared with which the grand Coutumier of the Normans, which was the vade mecum of that pushing race, seems altogether clumsy and barbaric.

Up the valley of the Usk came the Norman adventurers, making their way wherever mailed horsemen could ride;

but powerless among the hills and wilds. They penetrated as far as Brecon as early as 1093, and Bernard de Newmarch, the leader of the horde, built a castle on the neck of ground where the river Honddu joins the Usk: a junction which gives the town its Welsh name of Aberhonddu. The site is fertile and beautiful, and about the ruins of Norman castle and Norman priory are now pleasant walks and gardens. There are remains, too, of the old town walls which once protected the burghers of the town—mostly English settlers—from the fierce rushes of the Welsh from the neighbouring hills. The town seems to lie at the very foot of those dark and frowning summits known as the Brecknock Beacons, or, sometimes, as Cader Artur—or, Arthur's Chair, once, according to tradition, the seat of dark Druidic rites.

Cader Artur is described by old Speed, who declares that from the summit men were accustomed to cast down "their cloakes, hats, and staves," which never reached the bottom of the precipitous rock, but "were with aire and winde still returned back and blowne up."

While north of Brecon the wild mountain ranges barred the way of the Norman invaders, they penetrated some twelve miles to the westward, still along the valley of the Usk, at places rather a ravine than a valley, as far as Trecastle, where a fragment of Bernard de Newmarch's castle is still in existence. And from Trecastle opens out one of the sweetest and most secluded vales imaginable; all the more lovely in contrast with the wild and rugged aspect of the surrounding country. But although wild and rugged in aspect, the country affords many fertile valleys, where cultivation is carried on with success, and the farmers of Brecon are among the most prosperous of their class; while the town of Brecon, as a local capital, enjoys an exceptional amount of well-being and comfort, and, with its pleasant walks, bright rivers, bridges, mills, and rushing streams, and its picturesque relics of the Old World, is deservedly a favourite residence and resort for the people of South Wales.

The castle, indeed, is now but an appendage to the hotel which bears its name; but part of the old keep still remains, and it bears a name—the Ely Tower—which records an episode of some historical importance.

In this tower, during the reign of Richard Crookback, was imprisoned Morton, Bishop of Ely, under the charge of the

Duke of Buckingham, then the feudal Lord of tower and town. When the Duke became mistrustful of Richard's purposes towards him, and resolved to make terms with the Lancastrian faction, he betook himself to the security of his Welsh retreat.

Oh, let me think on Hastings and begone
To Brecknock while my fearful head is on.

At Brecon the Duke's prisoner became his guest and fellow-conspirator. Through trusty Welsh adherents the pair were in communication with Margaret, Countess of Derby, the directing intelligence of the movement. And thus at Brecon were arranged the details of a plan which ended fatally for Buckingham, but eventually changed the dynasty of the British Crown.

In the country around Brecon, perhaps, the inhabitants preserve more fully than elsewhere in South Wales the primitive character of Welsh sentiment and mode of life; and we may still trace, in an altered form, many of the customs of the Cymry of old. Giraldus, who was himself one of the South Welsh, has given us a pleasant description of the habits of his countrymen, as they existed towards the close of the twelfth century. There were no poor in the country then, for every house was open to everyone, in unrestricted hospitality. Nor was there any luxury for those who were richest in flocks and herds; they only entertained the more people, and practised a more freely-lavished hospitality. In all the chief houses guests were continually arriving or departing. As each party arrived, water was proffered to wash their feet. If they accepted this graceful service, it was understood that the guests remained the night; otherwise, they departed before the evening meal was served. Those who arrived were entertained till evening by the conversation of the young women of the house, and the music of the harp. Nobody was more free and courteous, more sprightly in conversation, than the Welsh woman; for jealousy was a vice almost unknown among the Welsh, and the intercourse between the sexes was on a footing of freedom and equality.

The evening meal was the great event of the day, when all assembled under the common roof. But though plentiful, the meal was frugal; it was served on mats, and consisted chiefly of thin cakes baked on the stones, with sometimes chopped meat and broth. There was plenty of sweet milk, no doubt, and probably toasted cheese. During the whole of the meal, host and hostess waited assiduously upon their guests,

pressing them to eat, and chiding their want of appetite. Only when all the rest were satisfied, did the givers of the banquet take their share of what was left. As night came on, fresh rushes were heaped about the floor; the fire in the centre of the hall was replenished; a great blanket or series of blankets was produced, and the whole company lay down, just as they were, and slept as best they could. There was no superfluity of garments either by day or night. A light cloak and waistcoat, and a thin pair of the garments that were once said to accompany a light heart formed the whole equipment of the travelling Welshman.

And yet the Welshmen were not deficient in personal cleanliness. At some time or other the vapour or Roman bath was known among them, although its use, probably from scarcity of fuel, had gone out before Giraldus wrote. They cut their hair close round ears and eyes, and the face was clean-shaven, except for the moustache above the upper lip. Both men and women were remarkable for their beautiful teeth, not a special characteristic of the Welsh in the present day; and they devoted much pains to their preservation, polishing them sedulously with green hazel twigs and a woollen cloth, avoiding hot meats and drinks. The married women, too, cut their hair short, and wore as head-covering a large white veil folded in the form of a crown. The steeple-crowned beaver hat, once the characteristic head-gear of the Welshwoman, seems to date from no earlier than the seventeenth century, when such hats were generally worn.

The youth of the district were by no means of the home-staying sort to whom Shakespeare attributes homely wits. They roamed the country in bands under chosen leaders, often abroad all night and sleeping during the day. In this way they pursued amatory adventures, always with great secrecy; but the code of honour and morality between the sexes, though loose in some respects, was firm enough in others; and treachery between man and maid was almost unknown.

To lighten the cares of life there were music and song almost universally practised; the harp was rarely silent; and the bagpipe, with the *crwth* or crowd, the rudimentary violin of the period, had also their professors. The pipe seems long ago to have vanished un lamented from the land; but the *crwth* was occasionally heard in later years, the last performer having died, it is said, A.D. 1770. Every man, too, had his

throw-board, on which was played a kind of backgammon; and in some parts chess was known, and had been practised from time immemorial. Then there was football, in which whole districts engaged in contest. Add to these, constant meetings for trial of literary and bardic skill, where shepherds and herdsmen might often bear off the palm from those of higher degree, and it will be seen that the life of the community was sufficiently varied and pleasant, and rich in the elements of sentiment and emotion.

From the secluded valleys of Brecon, we may pass into the land of Morgan—whether named after Morgan Hen, a Prince of the tenth century, or from some more recondite source, is doubtful; but the term Glamorgan appears to have been originally applied to the district now known as the Vale of Glamorgan, the garden of South Wales, celebrated as

The country charming,

With wine, with wives, and with white houses.

The wives and white houses are still there; but the vineyards have shared the fate of those other vineyards in Kent and elsewhere, of which only the memory remains.

The ascendancy of the Normans in Glamorgan was more stubbornly disputed, and yet eventually far more complete, than in Brecon or the adjoining counties; and, hence, there is no part of the country more thickly studded with the remains of feudal castles, many of which were of great size and immense strength.

As to how the Normans first came into the land of Morgan, we have a graphic account from Welsh sources in a story that recalls the still more ancient story of the coming of the Saxons into Britain. The same causes, indeed, were still at work—the jealousy of rival chiefs and the want of unity among the nation in general.

It was in the reign of William Rufus in England, that Rhys-ap-Tudor was Prince of South Wales, a hoary Prince, full ninety years of age, but with the fire and energy of youth still burning within him. Some petty chiefs of the country, venturing to dispute his authority and forming a conspiracy against him, Rhys took the field against them, and drove them from their seats. One of the conspirators was Einion-ap-Colwyn, a Knight who had seen service with the Normans in their wars, and was acquainted with their leaders. He took refuge with Jestyn, Prince of the land of Morgan, who, on account of quarrels

and fancied slights, and perhaps real injuries, hated the Prince of South Wales as he hated no other man, even Saxon or Norman. Jestyn, thirsting for revenge upon Rhys, listened eagerly to his guest's account of the skill and powers of the Normans among whom he had served, and of his intimacy with their chiefs. "Enlist me a Norman band," said Jestyn, "who shall overthrow that old ruffian Rhys, and you shall have my fairest daughter Nest, and a dower of the best lands of my holdings."

Einion undertook the task, and crossed the Severn into Gloucestershire, where he met with Robert Fitzhamon, and proposed to him the adventure. Robert agreed to the terms—a heavy payment in gold was to be the reward for the service—and soon engaged twelve other Knights in the enterprise, who raised among them three thousand men-at-arms. The whole contingent sailed across the Severn Sea, and put themselves under the guidance of Jestyn. Old Rhys, nothing dismayed, gathered his forces and met the foreign array upon the field of Hirwain Wrgan, the long meadow, which Gwrgan, a Prince of a former generation, had given to the men of Aberdare. Old Rhys was killed, and his force was dispersed, and Jestyn at once paid down the stipulated hire of his allies. Tradition has preserved a memory of this transaction in the name of the site where the gold was paid, The Normans were satisfied with their pay, and marched off to Penarth, where there are docks and ships in plenty at this present time, there to embark for home.

Then it was Einion's turn to demand his reward: when was the marriage feast to begin, and how soon should he enter into possession of those fat lands? Jestyn turned upon him with scorn and derision. "Never shall my daughter be the wife of a traitor! Begone!" Einion went, sprang to horse, and away on the track of his friends, the Normans. As he reached the sea-shore, the last of the train had embarked, anchors were being lifted, sails unfurled, and the whole flotilla was about to depart. Einion waved his mantle frantically from the beach; his signals were observed, and a boat soon made for the shore. To Fitzhamon the Welsh Knight explained his hard case, laid open the weakness of Jestyn, besought him to return and do his friend justice, and possess himself of the rich land of Morgan. Fitzhamon hailed the opportunity with enthusiasm;

the army was quickly disembarked, and marched upon Jestyn's camp, which was surprised and destroyed, the Prince himself being driven as a fugitive from the land. Then the land was divided among the victors, Fitzhamon assuming the feudal headship, while each of his twelve Knights carved out for themselves subject baronies. Einion, however, also received a share with one of Jestyn's daughters to wife; nor were the descendants of the native Princes left unprovided for. Sundry of the Norman Knights, too, married the daughters of the chiefs they dispossessed, among these one Payn Turberville, who gained Coyty Castle and the lands about it without a blow, by marrying the daughter of its possessor. On this account he declined to pay dues to his feudal superior, as holding by Welsh and not by English tenure, and he joined the Welsh in their resistance to the Norman Lords. Some kind of peaceable arrangement was made, and Fitzhamon seems to have adjusted his claims to the satisfaction of the Welsh; and perhaps the Welshmen found their Norman rulers not more extortionate than their native Princes had been, and decidedly less turbulent.

More like a King in his own country than a subject vassal was the Earl of Glamorgan, with his Chancery, his Exchequer, his Mint, and dozens of subordinate offices. But the last of the line of Fitzhamon fell at Bannockburn, childless at the age of twenty-three, and his three sisters divided the good things of the Lordship among the noble English families into which they had married. The chief seat of the Norman Earls was at Cardiff, where a strong castle was built, the keep of which and a gateway still remain in the grounds of the modern residence of the Marquis of Bute. Lord Bute does not, however, hold the castle direct from the descendants of Fitzhamon. The castle came by descent to the great Earl of Warwick, and so through his daughter Ann to Richard Crookback, and thus to the Crown of the Tudors at the battle of Bosworth. Then it was granted to the Herberts, and thence came by descent to Lord Bute. The castle is not much, perhaps, but the rights and dues belonging thereto are worthy of all envy and admiration.

Fitzhamon's Knights, every one of the twelve, set to work to build castles: there are existing ruins of thirty castles in the county, many of them so close together that it is a wonder how their owners managed to get a living.

But the most splendid and extensive of the castles of Glamorgan is Caerphilly, which, although not so elegant or richly ornamented as the castles of King Edward the First in North Wales, is more extensive than any of these, and occupies a space of thirty acres within its various defences. The castle lies in a marshy kind of plain surrounded at a distance by barren hills; and it is difficult to fathom the purpose of such an enormous fortress in such a position, built as it was, not out of national resources, but from the funds of a subject Lordship.

Some kind of purpose, indeed, it served during the troubled reign of Edward the Second, when it was in the hands of the De Spensers, and was the refuge of the King himself for a few short days. The King and the De Spensers hoped that the Welshmen would rally to the cause of their first English Prince, and with the support of this great stronghold might make head against the Queen and Mortimer and the English Baronage. But in this they were disappointed, and Edward left the castle before the siege commenced, to throw himself into the hands of his enemies. The youngest of the De Spensers was left in the castle, which made a gallant defence, and finally capitulated on terms. From that time the castle seems to have been practically abandoned; and, when Owen Glendwr occupied the place a long time afterwards, it was but a melancholy ruin.

Another great pile, which seems to us without any particular *raison d'être*, is Saint Donat's Castle, halfway between Cowbridge and Bridgend. There for nearly seven centuries was established the family of D'Esterling, or Stradling, the founder of which was one of Fitzhamon's Knights, and it bears the mark of each succeeding century in its varied and picturesque outline. The castle is still partially occupied, and has, perhaps, been continuously inhabited since its first foundation.

The Normans, as usual, were not remiss in the way of building monasteries to atone for their violent deeds. The Abbey of Neath, surrounded by iron works and furnace fires, reminds one of Kirkstall, in Yorkshire, which exists under like conditions. It was founded by the De Granvilles, and colonised by Grey Friars from Savigny, in France, but afterwards became a regular Cistercian monastery.

Then there is Margam, an early founda-

tion by the famous Robert, Earl of Gloucester, the relics of which are to be found in the lovely grounds of Mr. Talbot's seat, backed by a noble oak forest, which covers Margam Hill with its dense foliage. And here you may fancy yourself in some sub-tropical region, so rich are the forms of the exotic plants in this favoured nook. The orangery at Margam owes its first establishment to the wreck of a Spanish vessel on the neighbouring shore. The vessel was freighted with orange and lemon plants, which were intended as a gift to one of our English monarchs—as tradition ranges between Queen Elizabeth and William of Orange, it will be safer not to say which. The plants were preserved at Margam till they could be forwarded to the Court of Saint James, and they were eventually bestowed in fee upon their custodians by good Queen Anne.

The Priory of Ewenny is another Norman foundation, that is, if Maurice de Londres were really a Norman, and not a good honest Cockney. Anyhow, the fine church of the priory, which is still in use, is of the early Norman character. The whole of the priory buildings bear traces of great defensive strength, being, no doubt, in considerable danger from hostile raids.

Then there is the Cathedral of Llandaff, which lies in a sweet secluded site; of no great pretensions as a cathedral, but the seat of one of the most ancient Bishoprics in the Kingdom, which has probably existed from the days of the Roman dominion in Britain.

More celebrated even than the cathedral, in the annals of the ancient Church of Wales, is the College of Llantwit, or Llanelltyd Fawr, founded by St. Illtyd himself, it is said, some time in the fifth century, and which became one of the chief seats of the learning of the Celtic Church. Here were, in the days of its early prosperity, seven halls, four hundred houses, and upwards of two thousand scholars, who hither resorted from Gaul and every part of Britain.

According to tradition, St. Illtyd presided for ninety years over his college, and, allowing him to be young when he began, he must be credited with having attained a patriarchal age. Some of the most distinguished of the Britons were here educated: Gildas, the historian; David, the future Patron Saint of Wales; Taliesin and Talhaiarn, noted bards;

Princes and Chiefs of Britain and Brittany without number.

The college had fallen almost to decay when Fitzhamon established himself in the country, and he re-established the place as a priory, making it a cell to Tewkesbury Abbey. This foundation was still in existence at the Reformation, but without any importance. Yet the ancient fame of the place was held in memory by the people, who brought there their dead from all parts, so that the church and neighbouring lands became one large cemetery.

Ecclesiastical in name, but not at all so in present aspect, is Merthyr Tydfil—Tydfil having been the virgin daughter of the original Brychan, who gave his name to Brecon, who was killed by pagan Saxons in the neighbourhood; hence, Merthyr or Martyr Tydfil.

There were ironworks here from an early period. It is impossible to be more definite than this in default of authentic history; and when the Kentish ironworks gave out, we hear of many of the Kentish founders removing to this place. But everyone will tell you that Robert Crawshay was the chief founder of Merthyr, a man of the present century, whose immediate ancestor was a Yorkshire lad who came to London to seek his fortune, and found it in a kind of wholesale ironmongering establishment in York Place. There was a large trade done there in flat irons, and, according to Mr. Crawshay, the London laundresses who came to buy them were so ready of hand that they managed to steal two for every one they bought. The young Yorkshire lad was set to sell flat irons on commission, and was so successful in dodging the laundresses that he laid the foundations of a fortune which was destined to revolutionise Merthyr Tydfil.

With its iron capital, Glamorgan has also its copper capital in Swansea, where copper smelting is carried on, with numerous other works of a sulphurous and smoky nature. Not that there is any copper to speak of about Swansea, but plenty of coal, and it pays better to bring the copper ore to the coal, than to take the coal to the copper ore.

It only now remains to notice the curious peninsula of Gower, which has a history and settlement of its own, having been first conquered and colonised by Henry de Newburgh, Earl of Warwick, A.D. 1099, who defeated the Welsh Princes in a battle fought near Penrice Castle. Subsequently Gower had a share of the Flemish settlers,

who also colonised part of Pembroke; and, while the rest of Glamorgan, in spite of Norman rulers, remained thoroughly Welsh in its language and manners, the peninsula of Gower has been for ages an English-speaking country, and shares with Pembroke the name of The Little England beyond Wales. And this seems to show the complete expulsion of the original Welsh-speaking inhabitants.

For remarkable, indeed, is the tenacity with which the Welshman clings to his native language. In spite of centuries of discouragement, the Welshman has not become English; and so far from being in danger of becoming extinct, the language is actually more widely spoken and its literature enjoys a greater circulation than ever. And we may well believe that there was something inspired in the words of the old Welshman of Pencadair, spoken so long ago as the reign of Henry the Second, and indeed addressed to that very monarch.

"Your power, O King, may weaken and distress this nation; but it can never be totally subdued by the wrath of man, unless the wrath of God concur. Nor do I think that any other nation than this of Wales, no, nor any other language, shall answer for this corner of the earth, when the last roll shall be called on the Day of Judgment."

IN THE OLD HOME.

THE blank, uncurtained windows stare
Like sightless eyes along the wall;
The doors stand open everywhere;
The vacant rooms are silent all,
Save when my passing footfall breaks
The stillness, and an echo wakes.

And this was home, and this the place
Where earliest years flowed smoothly on,
Its warmest hearth an empty space,
Its truest friendships dead and gone;
The fire of passion burnt away,
And life in ashes, cold and grey.

And here, in manhood's latest prime,
With none that kindred blood can claim,
I stand unknown, forgotten. Time
Has put aside our race and name;
And shorn of bud, and leaf, and bough,
The barren tree is useless now.

O childhood! past beyond recall;
O youth! with happiest memories fraught.
Though after days may bring to all
The graver brow, the deeper thought,
The ripest wisdom years impart
Weighs light against a happy heart.

Too late! Why loiter here? Behold!
The noon is spent, the day is o'er,
The mists are gathering damp and cold,
The vanished hours return no more.
No magic spell has power to raise
The friends, the home of happier days.

BETWEEN THE TWO.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE two houses stood side by side on the white, dusty road which leads out of Saint Zite towards Toulouse. The front doors opened abruptly on to the "trottoir"; the front windows looked straight on to the busy highway; and, on reception days, when the outside shutters were opened, an inquisitive passer-by could see between the white curtains what visitors had come to pay their respects to Madame Amboise or Madame Lacambre; but reception days only came once a week, and the drawing-room shutters were generally closed.

There was more life at the back of the houses, in the shady, gravelled courtyard, where old Monsieur Lacambre fed his chickens; where Monsieur le Commandant Amboise smoked his cigarettes; where Madames Lacambre and Amboise sat with their work on summer evenings, discussing business—chiefly other people's; where the five mischievous Amboise children dirtied and tore their pinafores, to the distraction of their Cousin Gabrielle, and threw stones at Monsieur Lacambre's chickens, whenever a favourable opportunity occurred.

From whichever side you took your observation they were not romantic-looking houses—to speak truly, they were essentially commonplace; but, to Joel Chester, Professor of English at the College of Saint Zite, the one enchanted spot of the whole world was one of those two houses in the Faubourg Champenatier, and Thursday afternoons, when he gave an English lesson to the Amboise children, were the red-letter days by which he reckoned his calendar and dated his hopes; for Gabrielle Amboise, the niece of Monsieur le Commandant, who sat with the children while Joel administered his doses of instruction, had taken possession of his heart, and his head, and his hopes, and of all that any enthusiastic young lover can lay at the feet of his first love.

Joel was just six-and-twenty. He was tall and fair, broad-shouldered and erect, with blue-grey eyes and bright brown hair. He was generally acknowledged to be handsome and agreeable, and he was decidedly clever; altogether, the sum total of his good qualities made up a very fascinating man. But there was one thing against him which all his advantages could not

cover up or disguise—he was lamentably poor, and there seemed small chance of his growing richer. So, when he reckoned his calendar and adjusted his hopes by his weekly visits to the Maison Amboise, he was a sadly foolish fellow, for Gabrielle was poor too, poorer than himself; and if he could have realised his dream of bliss and married her at once, they would have had the wolf at the door with the shortest possible notice, which would have been anything but a desirable climax to their romantic attachment.

I suppose if Gabrielle had been the daughter of Madame Amboise instead of only her niece by marriage, she would not have been left alone with a handsome young man, especially such a poor one; but Madame had not been circumspect, and the mischief—if mischief it were—had every opportunity for growing. Joel seized his opportunity after a certain lesson, when the children had rushed away; and, while they in the courtyard were calling down the vials of Monsieur Lacambre's wrath, he, upstairs, had pleaded his cause, and won it. They promised to love one another for ever, or even longer if possible, and—this was Mademoiselle Gabrielle's stipulation—to keep the secret of their promise strictly to themselves, lest her guardians should take a too matter-of-fact view of Joel's prospects, and put an end to their romance without delay.

It was a very delicious idyl to both of them. Gabrielle had had a hard time of it with poverty and one thing or another during her twenty-three years of life. Her past contained little that was pleasant to recall, and she had not until now found any charm in looking forward to the future. As it was, she saw—she would have profited very little by what she knew of the world's ways had she failed to see—that her clandestine engagement was quite as likely to bring her nothing but poverty after a long weary waiting, if it did not bring her worse trials; but it was pleasant to love, to be loved, to have an idol and to be an idol, to have some one to dream of while one was darning stockings or replenishing the ever-diminishing stock of pinafores; it was pleasant to drift away down the current of sweet recollection and to lose the thread of Madame Lacambre's inexhaustible gossip or her equally interminable stories of her son Adolphe; it was pleasant to feel Joel's passionate eyes fixed on her face, while the children bungled and stumbled over their trans-

lation; and pleasanter still to listen to his sweet stolen words when the lesson was over, and he ventured to linger for a few minutes in the dingy school-room. Truly these were times when Gabrielle would lay her hands in her lap and wonder what she had done to deserve such a sudden glorious burst of sunshine.

So the summer slipped away; the longest day came and went; the chickens which the children had chased on the memorable day of Joel's declaration were nearly fit to be killed and eaten; the peaches were ripening out of the children's reach in the July sunshine. In the regular course of events Joel ought to have been thinking of leaving Saint Zite for his annual holiday, and of going to rejoice the eyes of his mother in England, who very properly considered him to be one of the best and finest sons a mother ever had. The holidays were so near that he had come to give his last lesson for the present at the Maison Amboise. The task of teaching English to a French child is by no means an enviable occupation, yet Joel felt truly sorry when he closed the books that day, and sent the unruly Amboise children rushing into the freedom of their holidays.

"And you will be going to England, I suppose?" queried Mademoiselle Gabrielle, as Joel, with a somewhat doleful face, watched her collect the books and pens.

"I don't know, my darling. I don't feel as if I could go to England this summer."

"Why not?" demands Mademoiselle, with great naïveté. "You surely would not pass your holiday here?"

"Wouldn't I, indeed?" cried Joel. "If it wasn't rather rough on the mother not to go and see her, do you think I would for one moment think of leaving you for two months?"

"Pooh," replied she, but she did not look as if she meant to snub him; "two months will soon pass; though, after all, the time is really six weeks. Six weeks is gone like nothing at all."

"Yes, yes, when you don't want it to go—like the last six weeks—but when one is impatient for the end of it, it is an eternity."

"Then don't be impatient," said Gabrielle philosophically. "Why should you? Nothing can stop the time from passing."

"You hard-hearted child," cried Joel, only half in jest. "Remember we can't write to one another; at least I can't write to you, and the sight of you is what I live for."

"My dear Joel," said Mademoiselle Gabrielle, with an air of superiority. "I am not hard-hearted, and I am going to reason with you."

"Very well, my darling, reason away; only kiss me first, for I foresee that your reasoning will want sweetening to make it go down. You are going to say that you cannot write to me either."

"Oh no, I am not going to say anything of the sort. I was going to suppose for a moment that you stayed here instead of going to England. Of course, as you say, for your mother's sake that would be impossible—but if you did, how should we be the better off? You would not be coming to the house for the children's lesson. All the college people would be away; we should perhaps have two or three chance words with one another under every one's eye in some stupid drawing-room. What is that compared to the ennui of six weeks at Saint Zite, thrown on your own resources?" And Gabrielle looked into her lover's face with an air of conviction.

"The ennui would not be fatal," said Joel plaintively. "If I go to England—at least, of course I am going, but I shall not stay all the time there. I shall come back, and as to seeing one another only in formal visits, that need not be."

"Do you mean that I could meet you anywhere? Oh, that would be so very far out of the question. I dare not—I really—Listen, there is my aunt calling, I must go. Yes, ma tante, I come. Good-bye, my dearest, I will write to you if I possibly can. Yes, I will, and you must think of me; but to meet you—" and Mademoiselle Gabrielle shook her head sadly but decidedly. "Yes, yes, ma tante, I come. I do but finish laying aside the books."

CHAPTER II.

THE Maison Lacambre was "en fête." The only son was coming to spend a month with his parents. Madame Lacambre wore her best black silk, and Monsieur had discarded his usual home costume of dressing-gown and carpet slippers for an alpaca coat and boots. The Amboise children were overawed into orderly behaviour, and the chickens would have had halcyon days if the arrival of Monsieur Adolphe Lacambre had not struck the death-knell of the plumpest of them.

For Monsieur Adolphe was a great personage. He lived in Paris, which

speaks volumes, and had to be treated accordingly. In his personal appearance he was perhaps a little disappointing—at least Gabrielle Amboise found him disappointing; but then her beau-ideal was an uncommonly well-favoured specimen of humanity, with whom Mr. Adolphe's short stature, sallow complexion, and small irregular features could not enter into comparison. As to age, he must have been on the downhill side of forty; and his years had written themselves on his forehead and round his eyes, and had traced out sundry white streaks in his hair.

All this Gabrielle saw with half a glance, as she sat with her aunt on the Amboise side of the courtyard; while Mr. Adolphe and his parents sauntered, on the first evening of his arrival, up and down in front of the chicken-pens.

"He is not much to look at, is he, *ma tante*?" she murmured to Madame Amboise. "To hear Madame Lacambre talk one would have fancied him an Adonis."

"He is not amiss," replied Madame Amboise indulgently. "If he were not so round-shouldered, I think he would be quite passable."

"You are charitable, *ma tante*."

"Handsome is that handsome does," returned Madame Amboise. "Monsieur Adolphe is a man who has made a good position for himself by ability and perseverance; his looks are a secondary consideration."

Just then Monsieur Adolphe, as if to allow a better opportunity for observation, crossed the courtyard to pay his respects to Madame Amboise. But it was not so much at Madame Amboise as at her niece that he looked while he made his obeisance in the most approved Parisian style.

"Allow me to present you to my husband's niece, Mademoiselle Amboise," said the elder lady, observing the direction of Monsieur Adolphe's glance.

Monsieur Adolphe acknowledged the introduction by a still more consummate bow.

"Mademoiselle is, doubtless, like myself, a visitor to St. Zite?" he said interrogatively.

Mademoiselle smiled demurely, and replied in the negative.

"Ah, indeed, then I must note Mademoiselle as a fixed star, not as a wandering one; yet I do not remember having seen you here before."

"I have lived with my uncle and aunt for about a year," replied Gabrielle.

"And it is two years since I visited St. Zite. I came in total ignorance that the place had gained so much—so great a charm—since my last visit."

It was a trite compliment, and the flourish with which it was paid did not enhance its value. Gabrielle could not help feeling amused that this plain-faced, cut-and-dried, middle-aged bachelor should deliver himself of such a school-boy speech; yet she felt at the same time more than a little flattered by his notice and his admiring looks. Adolphe Lacambre had always been described by his mother as totally indifferent to the charms of womankind.

"Two years since you were here before!" exclaimed Gabrielle, in reply. "That is a long time."

"At your time of life, Mademoiselle, no doubt it is; but at mine—ah, that makes all the difference. Two years are gone before one has time to think of them, and I come back to St. Zite to realise how long my absence had been, by seeing all the changes that have taken place. Your charming children, for instance, Madame, I could scarcely have recognised them, devoted as I am to children."

"Yes, indeed," replied Madame Amboise, with maternal preoccupation, "they do grow wonderfully fast, especially Mademoiselle."

"How very charming!" answered Monsieur Adolphe, quite irrelevantly.

It was not a brilliant conversation; but it was more memorable than any other in which Monsieur Adolphe had ever joined. As he said "How very charming!" at hazard, and looked down on the dark curly hair and piquant face of Monsieur Amboise's niece, he was conscious of a most unusual sensation in the region of his heart, which impelled him to talk anything, sense or nonsense, so that he could win a glance from those bright brown eyes which looked so nonchalantly across the courtyard, while he stood beside her.

"You have seen Paris, of course, Mademoiselle?" he said presently, no more original remark occurring to him.

"No, Monsieur, I have not. You will consider me terribly provincial, no doubt, but I must admit that I only know the life of Paris by hearsay."

"And what opinion have you formed of Paris life by hearsay?"

"Well," returned Gabrielle, amused by the solemnity of his manner, "I have gathered that it must be vastly more amusing than life in St. Zite."

"It is very bright, and gay, and attractive—outwardly. There is always a great deal to be seen and thought of, and a great deal of work to be done; but, for me, it is a very lonely life—a life the charm of which has long passed away."

Monsieur Adolphe spoke pathetically, and as if he were dealing with an old subject of lamentation, yet in truth this was the very first time it had ever occurred to him to describe his bachelor existence as lonely.

"Have you not many friends in Paris, then?" asked Gabrielle.

"Oh yes, friends as far as they go; but it is when one gets a chance view of domestic life—of a true homelike interior—that one's own forlorn condition becomes apparent."

"We shall expect, then, to hear soon that you are about to renounce your solitary state, and to request our congratulations," said Madame Amboise, looking up archly. From her long acquaintance with Monsieur Adolphe, her knowledge of his settled bachelor habits, she expected a smiling denial; instead of which, to her surprise, over the cautious face of the avocat there passed a slight blush, and he murmured something which she could not hear, but of which she caught the word "happiness." After which, he bade the ladies good evening, and beat a hasty retreat, and followed his parents into the house.

"It would be amusing, if he were to have fallen in love after all," said Madame Amboise, as the door of the Maison Lacambre closed. "It would be really very funny."

"It would be still more funny," said Gabrielle, "if any one had fallen in love with him. Ma foi, ma tante, he is painfully plain at close quarters; fancy having to sit opposite to such a face every day of one's life!"

"I meant no allusion to his looks," replied Madame Amboise somewhat severely, "he has other attractions; and I have no doubt that if he did make an offer to any woman, he would more probably be accepted than refused."

"Good Heavens, ma tante, how could he make an offer of marriage? He scarcely knows how to talk to a woman. Did any one ever hear such wooden remarks as he makes?"

"Ah well, Gabrielle, you, no doubt can afford to be critical—you, who are so richly endowed, can require every man who goes

a wooing to have a fine face, a good figure, brilliant wits, and a handsome fortune; but let me tell you that a girl of sense prefers the solid to the trivial."

"Ah well, ma tante," returned Gabrielle, unmoved by the sarcasm of this reproof, "it will be time enough to scold me for depreciating Monsieur Adolphe when he comes wooing me. In the meantime, it matters very little what I think or say of him."

Perhaps Monsieur Adolphe's devotion to the Amboise children was genuine; anyhow, it was extremely well assumed. He lost no time in renewing his acquaintance with them, and in laying siege to such of their affection as was to be won by lavish presents of bonbons and toys.

"He's not half bad," commented the children, in the course of a fortnight, "although he looks such an old fogey. He met us yesterday afternoon up at St. Antoine, and he bought us a lot of peaches out of the garden of the woman who keeps the wax candles for the shrine, and we sat on the grass by the chapel steps and ate them. Oh, it's grand fun when Monsieur Adolphe meets us out for a walk: he talks to Gabrielle, and we do just as we please. Gabrielle never looks at us."

It was quite true. Monsieur Adolphe had a wonderful gift of meeting with the Amboise party "en promenade," and then of finding a good reason to join them, or, rather, to join Gabrielle, while the children ran helter-skelter behind and before them. Moreover, in the evening, after dinner, he invariably joined the group of ladies in the courtyard, in preference to strolling out along the Boulevards with his father and the Commandant.

It was very evident whither all this was tending; and Madame Amboise already admitted to herself that when Monsieur Adolphe did make an offer of marriage it would matter very vastly what Gabrielle thought of him and of it. What she did think, it was not easy to surmise. Since that first evening she had made no remarks to her aunt in confidence respecting their neighbour's son.

Madame Amboise was puzzled by her reticence; yet it was plain that she did not discourage her elderly admirer, and, from the long pensive fits that sometimes came over the girl, her aunt thought it possible that his marked attentions might be making a conquest of her prejudices.

They had not very long to wait. Before three weeks of Monsieur Adolphe's holiday

had gone by, there came an afternoon when he dressed himself in a solemn, closely-fitting frock coat, and irreproachable continuations; put his extremities into the glossiest of hats, gloves, and boots; and marched with a resolute step out of his parents' front door to that of the adjacent house. He was on his way to make a formal demand for the hand of Monsieur le Commandant's penniless niece. It was a ceremonious visit. The Commandant professed himself overwhelmed with the honour done him in the person of his adopted daughter.

The avocat declared that it was he himself and no other to whom honour would be done, since one smile or one word from the peerless Mademoiselle Gabrielle was of more value to him than any distinction with which he might be tempted.

"You know, cher Monsieur," said the Commandant, with a shade of hesitation, "that my late lamented brother had losses in business. My niece is absolutely and entirely without dowry, and I am not in a position to rectify the deficiency."

Monsieur Adolphe waved his shiny glove with the air of a man who dismisses a trifling question. "To a sordid dowry of pounds, shillings, and pence, I am utterly indifferent; the lady's own charms form a dowry more precious in my eyes than a diamond mine."

To a negotiation carried on in this spirit there could be but one conclusion. Monsieur Amboise was only too delighted to give his unqualified consent to the avocat's unexpected proposal, and to feel assured, as he bowed his visitor out, that here was a very comfortable solution to the uncomfortable problem of his niece's future.

That evening full liberty was accorded to the Amboise children to run whithersoever the spirit of mischief might lead them, while solemn conclave was held by their seniors over the momentous question of Monsieur Adolphe's proposal.

"I wish, ma niece," began Monsieur le Commandant, "to have a few minutes' conversation with you on a most important subject; I mean about your future. Let me see, you are, I believe, three-and-twenty years of age?"

"Three-and-twenty!" cried Madame Amboise. "My dear Charles, she was nearly four-and-twenty when she came to us last May year."

"Ah, indeed," replied the Commandant, "you don't really say so? I should scarcely have believed the time had flown so fast."

"No one grows younger naturally, mon ami," returned Madame Amboise; "and what is more serious is, that when a girl has passed the age of four-and-twenty without a single offer of marriage, she has a fair chance of being an old maid."

"Yes, indeed," added Monsieur Amboise. "And when, moreover, as in our niece's case, the girl has not a sou to bless herself with, offers of marriage are scarcely to be expected."

Gabrielle's understanding would have needed to be far duller than it actually was for her not to have seen whither all this was leading.

"I suppose," she suggested, "that all men do not fall in love with money."

"I don't suppose," replied her aunt, "that any man positively falls in love with money; but, when a man thinks of marrying, money is necessary, and as a rule, a young man cannot afford to overlook a dowry."

"And the few who can afford it are not sufficiently generous," said the Commandant, fingering his trump card with great satisfaction before he played it; but his diplomacy in coming to the point counted for nothing, as far as concealment was concerned. From his last word, Gabrielle knew for a certainty that Monsieur Adolphe wanted to make her his wife.

"Now, Gabrielle," pursued her uncle, "there is nothing your aunt and I would like better than to see you comfortably married to a man on whose character we could rely; until lately, we have seen no prospect of our desire being fulfilled. To-day, your hand has been formally asked in marriage—your lack of fortune making no obstacle—by a man whom we might—" but the Commandant's eloquence was too prolix for his wife.

"Come, Gabrielle," she cried, interrupting him. "Guess who it is, I'll give you three guesses."

"I don't need to guess," replied Gabrielle. "I know without guessing; who else could it be but Monsieur Adolphe Lacambre?"

"Why, you sly little puss, you have gone and lost your heart to him; after all the cutting remarks you made about him at first. You needn't deny it. You have gone crimson. It's perfectly delicious!" and Madame Amboise clapped her hands.

"It is an exceptionally good match for any girl," said Monsieur Amboise.

Then they went on talking it over; they asked her no more questions; they took her willing consent for granted. Gabrielle's

colour came and went; her heart beat at double speed. A number of sweet memories and solemn promises came crowding into her mind; what could she do? It would be so dreadful to cast down her guardian's bright expectations, by telling him that she was bound by promises he knew nothing of to marry a man whom he would never allow her to marry.

She had heard and read of people playing fast and loose with vows and promises; she had always considered such characters, especially the female ones, excessively wicked. She did not wish to be wicked herself, and she did not wish to break poor Joel's heart; on the other hand, she did not want to be poor all her life, and, as to hearts, Monsieur Adolphe had a heart too. At his time of life, a refusal would make him very unhappy; and last, but not least, she dared not, she positively dared not, tell the story of her engagement with Joel, while he was far away in England. She had never foreseen anything like this; she was perfectly helpless; and she knew that she would be miserable whichever way she decided to act.

"I expect the Lacambres will come this evening," said the Commandant, in conclusion, "to hear the result of our deliberations. When shall we say you can be ready, Gabrielle? You know Monsieur Adolphe is past the waiting age, he will be in a hurry to have the time fixed."

"In six weeks or so, I should think," said Madame Amboise, "or a couple of months at the latest. N'est ce pas, Gabrielle?"

"You know best, ma tante," replied Gabrielle submissively; and, having said that, she knew that the die was cast; that she was so far on the downhill road that turning back was all but impossible, and that she had yielded without a struggle, even without coercion, every claim to womanly constancy and womanly truth.

SOUTH AFRICAN SKETCHES.

TWO LOOKS AT A RIVER.

We were looking forward to our arrival at the Zout, or Salt River, in the belief that we should at last be able to wash there. At least, such of us as had not been sufficiently long in the colony to have become accustomed to that condition of dirt, which, through the scarcity of water, is imposed upon one almost as a necessity "up country," were so looking forward; and the upward Diamond Field

Transport waggon contained an unusual proportion of "new hands" amongst its passengers on this trip. They were mostly recent arrivals from England; young men pushed by the restless spirit of the Anglo-Saxon, and by a contributory impecuniosity, to leave the scenes of their social successes in the Northern Hemisphere, and rough it for a time in South Africa. It is needless to say that they were bound for the Diamond Fields. They were buoyant and full of spirits, confident that in a few months, or in a year at the most, they would return home with pockets full of money. They talked of short cuts to wealth, and spoke contemptuously of the plodding, muddy-minded men, who were content to grovel on at money-making in the old, conventional grooves, when such magnificent opportunities as those afforded by the diggings were available. Alas, for the rose-coloured pictures of youth! It is now nearly fourteen years since these enthusiasts arrived at the Cape, and they are still there, and have not yet succeeded in amassing those "piles" which were to throw into deep shadow the fortunes of the most successful financiers of Europe.

To the youths the journey had so far proved exceedingly unpleasant. Since they had left Cape Town five days before, all ablution had been confined to a mere daubing of face and hands with a little coffee-coloured water contained in a tin pannikin; and they had been so restricted at a time when, from the intense heat and perpetual clouds of dust, a good bathe would have been most necessary and enjoyable. I could not help pitying them, torn as they were by a resistless impulse or implacable fate from the charms of town—where the matutinal tub was an article of religious belief; where two clean shirts a day were considered a necessity of life; and where the smallest wrinkle in the smooth expanse of collar or the least speck of dust upon the glossy surface of the coat was a matter of mortal anguish—to be suddenly plunged into dirt inconceivable, where one had to wear the same shirt for a week at least; where washing was impossible; and where fleas, flies, dust, and perspiration combined to make one feel thoroughly miserable. Roughing it they were prepared for, hard fare and bedless nights they would have put up with; but this horrible condition of uncleanness was a thing that they had not anticipated, and their complaints were loud and frequent.

"I don't mind the discomfort and want of sleep," murmured my next-door neighbour in the waggon, a smooth-faced youth with fair hair and light blue eyes; and who, having neglected to study when at the establishment of the expensive Army "crammer" in which his parents had placed him, had failed to qualify for the honour of wearing Her Majesty's uniform. "I don't mind the jolting, the bruises, and the hard seats; but, by Jove, I can't stand this continual state of filth. I feel so beastly dirty." And he looked despondently at the rich coating of red dust which covered his hands and arms.

They had crossed several so-called rivers in their route, but they had all been dry; and the mirage in the Karroo, which had displayed before them at dawn a tantalising vision of a broad sheet of placid water, fringed with dwarfed willows, had only made them suffer the more by its cruel deception. They consequently eagerly looked forward to the Salt River, which, the guard assured them, would have at least some pools of water in its channel; for did it not drain the rugged basaltic hills of Bulbholders Bank (as the eastern spur of the Nieuwveld Mountains was called), whose sterile steeps were too flinty to absorb the dew or rain which might fall upon them, and all of which would, in consequence, collect into the bed of the river?

We had left Beaufort West at nine in the morning; had crossed the Beaufort Flat with its clumps of acacias; traversed an arid, sterile, and naked plain, outspanned for an hour at noon in the "veldt" to eat a hasty meal of biscuit and "biltonge," and were now, at six in the evening, looking out for Debenish's Farm, just beyond which was the Salt River.

According to the guard's original programme, we were to have arrived at Debenish's at half-past six, had supper there, and have left at half-past seven; and it was only after his seasoned palate had been liberally moistened by "nips" of whiskey, Congo brandy, and Cape Smoke, that he had consented to lengthen his stay by half-an-hour to give us an opportunity of bathing. This eagerness to become clean was to him an inexplicable enigma.

"S'pose you do wash in the river," he said again and again. "Twelve hours after you will be just as dusty as ever. What's the use of taking the trouble of undressing for nothing?"

All the hopes of the "new hands" were pinned upon the Salt River, for after cross-

ing that we should come upon no river containing water till we struck the Orange River at Hopetown, and that would be three days further on. The number of questions that were asked the guard about the river—Why was it called the Salt River? Was it deep? Was it broad? Was the current strong? Could one take a header?—these, and a hundred different questions, put forward in various guises, made the guard break out into explosions of strange Africander oaths at least twenty times a day.

Hadn't he said, till he was sick of saying it, that at this time of year there wouldn't be more than a few pools of water among the rocks. Would they be deep? No; they wouldn't. Any fool would know that there wouldn't be more than enough water to cover his ankles.

Just before 6.30 p.m. the mules drew up at Debenish's, a farmhouse both internally and externally superior to anything of the kind I have ever seen "up country," and the waggon disgorged its tired and dusty occupants. "The boys," as the English youths had come to be known to their Colonial fellow-passengers, dived into their bags for soap and towels, hurriedly enquired which was the shortest way to the river, and at once started off. I, too, departed in the same direction, for I had not then been long enough in South Africa to have got over that foolish prejudice against dirt, and I still looked upon bathing as a duty, and one that was not altogether unpleasant.

An irregular line of wind-warped African willows and acacias defined in the plain before us the course of the river, and in a few minutes we reached it. At the point at which the road crossed, a dry, shingly bed of sand, grit, pebbles, and larger stones, looking as parched as if no water had moistened it since the Deluge, extended from one bank to the other. The banks were almost perpendicular, except where they had been cut down for the road; and their smoothly swept faces told of the strength of the stream which at times flowed between them; while five or six feet above the dry bed, tufts of withered grass, dead camel-thorn branches, and other débris, tangled in the half-bared roots of the trees which sparsely fringed the summits of the banks, marked the height to which the last flood had risen.

A groan of disappointment broke from "the boys" at the appearance of the dry bed; but, plucking up hope, they com-

menced searching among the rocks up and down stream for water. We walked altogether about half-a-mile up the bed, and then, as the channel seemed to become drier and drier with every yard, I went back to the farm for supper. I advised "the boys" to follow my example; but they were too enthusiastic to think about eating, and continued their search amongst the loose stones and occasional rocks.

About an hour later, as the drivers were inspanning the mules, and we were getting ready to start, "the boys" returned, thirstier, dirtier, and more tired than when they had left the waggon, and hungry into the bargain. They had searched for three miles up the stream; now ankle-deep in sand, now climbing over a ridge of rocks, and now over the splintered and bleached trunks and limbs of uprooted trees; and at last, at a spot where the rotatory motion of pebbles and grit, caught in an eddy under one bank, had in the course of years ground a cup-like hollow, they found some water to the extent of perhaps four quarts. That was all they had seen, and they had drunk that, because they had grown so thirsty by that time, that bathing had become quite a secondary consideration. Such was the Salt River when I saw it for the first time.

Some months later, I again saw the Salt River, but under very different circumstances. I was going southward then, and was travelling in a Cape cart, drawn by two horses and driven by the owner, who was giving me a lift down. There had been heavy thunderstorms almost daily, and the Orange River, when we had crossed it at Salt Pan's Drift, had been rolling on in a turbulent flood that threatened very shortly to make the working of the "pont," or floating bridge, impossible. We had stopped at Philipstown in the midst of a heavy downpour; the Hondeblas was rising fast, and the flat-topped hills of Paarde Berg and Rhinoster Berg had been crowned with masses of dark clouds, extended in sharply-defined horizontal lines. It poured with rain as we left Murraysberg and ascended into the Sneeuwberg District; cold gusts of wind drove clouds of rain-spray into the cart, and caused the tilt to tug and flap as if it were about to break loose; while on every side, as far as the eye could reach, was nothing to be seen but a lowering canopy of lead-coloured clouds and an apparently endless plain dotted with puddles.

It was nearly dusk when we reached the Salt River, and we found, halted on our side of the stream, an ox-waggon, with a span of fourteen oxen, which had arrived a few minutes before us, and which we had seen crawling along the road in front of us for the last half-hour. The Tottie "fore-louper," or boy who leads the leading pair of oxen, scantily attired in a tattered flannel shirt, was standing by the span shivering with cold; and the warm breath of the cattle rolled in misty vapour along the sodden ground. The owner of the ox-waggon, a man of about forty years of age, with a sunburnt face, long and unkempt hair, and a thick, sandy beard, was standing on the river-bank, leaning on the bamboo handle of his long whip, gazing reflectively at the stream; and, inferring from his contemplative attitude that the river had risen, we got out of our cart and walked down towards him.

The scene was indeed changed. In place of the dry expanse of shingle which I had seen there before, a smooth, brown and foam-flecked flood rolled onward between the vertical banks, pitted and spotted in a thousand places by the heavy drops of rain which fell upon its turbid surface; the willows, tossed to and fro by the wind, shook and tottered in their crazy footholds on the verges of the banks; the waning light of evening, further obscured by the falling rain and the lead-coloured sky, gleamed with a sallow glow upon the surface of the water; and the whole universe appeared to reek and stream with moisture. It was one of the most depressing evenings that I ever remember.

The man with the beard looked up at us, nodded, and, shaking the accumulated drops of water from the brim of his felt hat, came to join us.

"Are you goin' to try to cross?" he asked.

"I think so," replied my friend. "What do you say?"

"Well, I don't know this river, so I can't tell what depth of water there may be. P'raps one of you might be able to say?"

I said that I thought I could estimate the depth. I said that I had noticed, when I was there before, that the banks were about seven feet high, that at present there appeared to be about five feet from the top of the bank to the surface of the water, and that consequently the latter could only be about two feet deep. I added that the bed was fairly level where

the road crossed it, and that the stream would not be deeper in the middle than at the sides.

"Well," continued the man with the beard, "I shall be main glad if I can get across to-night, and outspan at Debenish's, for I 'spect my wife in thar' to be confined every minute." And he jerked back with his thumb, over his shoulder, in the direction of the waggon.

We turned and looked round, and saw a meek and sad-eyed woman, with a white and haggard face, sitting on the driver's seat, and leaning back against the cases and boxes which filled up the interior of the waggon. She was clad in a thin print dress, which, wet and clammy from the drops of water which dripped from the arch of the waggon-tilt over her head, clung closely around her. Pulling at this dress was a child about three years of age, crying querulously in a low key; but the woman took no notice of it, and lay still, with her hands tightly clenched in front of her, and her eyes gazing out into vacancy. But for an occasional spasmodic contraction of the muscles of the face, and a nervous twitching of the clasped fingers, she might have been a statue of white marble, so mute and still was she; and in the gathering gloom of the evening her pale face, with its expression of unearthly pain, stood vividly out with ghost-like pallor from the dark background of the interior of the waggon.

"Poor thing! poor thing!" we both involuntarily murmured.

"It's like the dratted obstinacy o' wimmen, for her to choose such a onheard of time for it," continued her husband, whose finer feelings had perhaps been dulled by a too frequent familiarity with such domestic episodes. "It's playin' it uncommon low down on me, it is. What I am to do with her, with ne'er a woman, nor midwife, nor nothin' around?"

We looked at each other and felt that we were nonplussed, for what did we know concerning such matters?

"Well," at last said my friend, "I've had no experience in these things myself, so perhaps I oughtn't to offer advice. But I think it would be better if you could put her further under the tilt, out of the wet; and could make room for her to lie down."

"Lor bless you," said the husband, "she don't care nothin' for a little wettin'. She and me have often been out o' worse nights than this. Why, she's been a sittin' like

that for a matter of more'n two hours, takin' no notice of the rain nor nothin'. But are you a goin' to cross?"

"Yes."

"All right. If you can cross in your light cart, I guess I can cross in my waggon. If the stream don't carry you away, I guess I can stand it."

"Just so. You'd better see how we get through first. We'll wait for you on the other side, in case of accidents."

As I climbed up into the cart again, I stole another glance at the woman. She was sitting in the same position, with the rain trickling down her face, and the peevish child still whimpering, and pulling at her sodden dress. For a moment I thought of suggesting that we should put her in our cart, and drive her over the river to Debenish's; but then I did not know if she could be moved, or if my friend would care to have a woman in that state on his hands alone, for there was not room in the cart for three people. Besides, the waggon would cross more safely, and with less jolting than the light cart.

We drove slowly down the rather steep incline to the water, and entered the stream. The horses, accustomed to such work, stepped slowly and carefully; the brown flood swirled around their legs, and broke in a little wave of foam against the wheels; the current was strong, but the water was not deep, and we reached the further side without having had our axletrees under water.

We stopped on the top of the bank, and turned to look at the passage of the waggon. The oxen were started with a few cracks of the whip, and the "fore-louper" led them down to the water's edge. A little delay then occurred, for the cattle were frightened at the stream; but a few well-administered cuts drove them on, the man with the beard clambered on to the seat beside his wife, and the heavy vehicle rolled slowly across the river, the "fore-louper" leading, with the water splashing round his knees.

They had reached the middle of the stream, when a loud cry from the boy startled me. Looking up the river, I saw sweeping round the bend about five hundred yards above the ford, a mass of brown water, rushing onward like a wall. I felt a sickening sensation of horror. Would they get through before it struck them? The man howled, yelled, and shrieked at the oxen, and made his whip whistle over

their heads again and again. They broke into a trot; they would be saved. No—the “fore-louper” let go of the leaders, and ran like mad for the bank; the man with the beard threw himself out of the waggon, and tried to make for the same haven of safety; in another second the waggon would be overwhelmed.

I did not want to see the catastrophe, but I could not look away. Some horrible fascination kept my eyes fixed on the waggon, and the white, lifeless face of the motionless woman. In a moment the mass of seething water was upon them. The oxen were swept from their feet and buried under the muddy waves. The waggon shook and tottered; but it did not upset, it was too heavily laden to turn over, even though it was broadside on to the flood—she might yet be saved. The racing waters surged into the waggon, and leapt and splashed nearly over the tilt, while the struggles of the drowning oxen carried onward by the torrent, with here and there a pair of horns or a head buoyed up by the wooden yoke appearing above the surface, turned it obliquely to the stream.

At last the woman moves. She is stretching out her hand; she is saying something. Good Heaven! What is it? The roar of the flood drowns her words. See! she has taken the child in her arms now. Where is the man—the husband? In my anxiety for the woman I had not given him a thought. The boy is standing near us, shivering on the bank. Coward! if he had stuck to the leaders they might have been got through. Ah! the woman is pointing to her husband. See, that is his head away down there, now the bend hides him from view, he is swimming with the stream. She wants us to go after him; but he will no doubt be safe enough unless he gets staked on a submerged branch; anyhow he thought of himself first, and now we will think of her.

How dark it is getting! Through the sheets of falling rain I can only just distinguish the white waggon-tilt and the still whiter gleam of the pale, despairing face. Can we do nothing to help? No: no man could stem that current even for a moment.

What is that grey object above there, coming down the river? Great Heavens! it is a huge dead tree, and that is a splintered and bleached limb that we see projecting from the water. If it strikes the waggon the woman is lost indeed. How fast it comes down! I think it will pass by on this side. No, it will graze the

wheels and glance off—no, an eddy has caught it; now it swirls round; it has struck. The waggon heels over, slowly, slowly, and then seems to be sucked down by the turbid flood. The child is gone. Look! That is its arm gleaming white amongst the drowning oxen. The waggon is right over, the woman is in the water.

We rush wildly about on the bank. For a few moments we can see a white face floating on the waters, then it vanishes in the gathering gloom, and we can see no more. We run along the bank down stream, in the vain hope that some eddy may sweep her near enough for us to seize her dress; but not a sound do we hear, nor another trace do we see, of the ill-fated woman or her child.

About a mile down the river we find the man, clinging exhausted and half drowned to a bough which sweeps the surface of the water. We draw him out, not without difficulty, and in reply to his eager questions we can only shake our heads. We lead him back to the ford, silent and with hanging head. Not a trace of the waggon is now to be seen; darkness has closed around; and the river flows on like a torrent of ink, amid the sough of the rain, and the moaning of the chill night-wind. We shiver with cold and excitement. Is all this real, or only some horrible dream?

“What is the use of staying here now? They are both dead; they are past help now. Come, let us go up to Debenish’s.”

UNCLE BOB'S NIECE.

By LESLIE KEITH.

Author of “*The Chilcotes*,” etc.

CHAPTER XX.

It was the fashion among the lady boarders, when one of them went out to any very special entertainment, to test the merits of her toilet by a preliminary appeal to the drawing-room. This was accomplished in various ways, according to the idiosyncrasy of the individual. Mrs. Drew, whom her husband loved to deck with Oriental splendour, generally appeared with a laughing protest that did not in the least hide her innocent satisfaction; Mrs. Moxon, who cherished roundabout methods, manoeuvred to evade the charge of direct intention by conveniently forgetting something at the last moment, and slipping in modestly to secure it, and so getting her meed of admiration; Mrs. Sherrington,

who dressed to please her husband, and was conscious of latent disapproval on the part of the other women, got through the ordeal as quickly as might be, standing in the doorway and eclipsing her limp draperies with a shawl before half their eccentricity had been revealed.

"As for me, I've never anything new to show," said Honoria, when describing this established custom to Tilly. "They know my gowns off by heart, and would detect any shred or patch of disguise in a minute. What a feast you will be to them!"

Tilly had laughed, but she was willing enough to share her finery, and took some trouble to display the contents of her boxes for the beguilement of a wet day. She was at once the envy and delight of the household; her bright beauty and her fair fortune had in them all the elements of a living romance, and stirred the most sluggish fancy; it was a three-volume novel which was being worked out before them, with the added charm that each could end it for herself as she willed, shaping it to a happy conclusion, or closing it in tragedy and gloom, according to her fancy.

To-night, however, when her toilet was most faultless, Tilly refused to submit it to the verdict of the drawing-room.

"I can't. Don't ask me," she said; and she hurried downstairs when the carriage was announced to check Honoria's protests.

"She's fretting [because her uncle won't go with her," said Honoria to the expectant group round the fire. "She wouldn't come in."

"Is she going quite alone?" asked Mrs. Drew, with concern in her motherly voice.

"Quite alone."

Mrs. Moxon, who loved the decencies of life, looked up from her knitting to emit a faint, shocked "Oh!"

"I don't think it's the social aspect of the question that is disturbing her," said Honoria, who saw no disloyalty in discussing her absent friend's feelings. "I don't suppose there was such a thing as a chaperon in Lilliesmuir."

"Some one ought to interfere," said Mrs. Moxon, with icy formality. "It is quite against Madame Drave's interests; it is most prejudicial to her to have such people here."

"Madame Drave can take care of herself," said Mrs. Drew a trifle impatiently.

"Why didn't Mr. Burton go, Honoria? Do you know? What is he doing?"

"As to what he is doing," said Honoria sharply, "he is listening at this moment to that everlasting Behrens. Whether it is that that has kept him from going with Tilly, I can't tell; but I know this, that he's quite changed since I first knew him."

"He doesn't seem very sociable," said Mrs. Drew; "but, then, we're all women except the Major and Mr. Sherrington—who are both too lazy to be entertaining—and those young fellows who don't count for anything with a man of large experience."

"Oh, he's sociable enough—or was," said Honoria, wrinkling her brows as she looked into the fire. "The odd thing is that he is changed. One doesn't expect a man who is so limited as he is to change."

"You can't be expected to account for the behaviour of a person who is totally removed from our sphere, my dear Honoria," said Mrs. Moxon, speaking with a tone of finality; "my dear husband, who, as a clergyman was forced to mix with all sorts of people, used to say that a delicately brought-up lady could not conceive what roughness exists out of her own class."

"Well," said Honoria, somewhat too brusquely—Mrs. Moxon was a person who frequently induced bluntness in her listeners—"I suppose I wasn't delicately brought up; at any rate, I find the man extremely interesting. He is at least perfectly honest; you haven't to creep in at the back door, and go upstairs and round corners to surprise his real meaning."

If this pert speech were charged with any intention, Mrs. Moxon ignored it; perhaps in that remote and virtuous distance to which she had withdrawn, she did not even hear it. Mrs. Drew, who was a peace-loving soul, turned the talk into some other channel, and no more was said at the time; but in the privacy of her own sitting-room—while she reposed in one of the camp chairs that recalled tender reminiscences of their Indian life, with her husband, who was smoking, lounging opposite to her—she reverted to the subject.

"They've let that little girl go out alone," she said.

He looked at her with lazy amusement.

"What a chance for the young fellows! But she's sharp enough; she can take care of herself," he added, seeing that she received this view unsmilingly.

"I wish—I wish——" she began.

"Oh, I know," laughed the Major.

"You wish you could adopt her, and look after her, and finally marry her to that good-for-nothing boy of yours out yonder. Long experience has made me familiar with that wish before you express it."

"You are going a little too fast for me, my dear," said Mrs. Drew, with apparent meekness. "I was only going to wish you would find out about this Behrens, who is always coming here."

"What has he got to do with it?" he asked, staring at her through a haze of smoke.

"Perhaps something, and perhaps nothing," she answered, choosing to be enigmatical. "If we're to marry that pretty child to our boy—as you seem to have settled—it's possibly more important than you think." She laughed at him with frank good-humour.

"Well, I suppose his consent would have to be obtained. It seems to me that that poor, stupid old fellow can't breathe without his permission."

He told her in a day or two the particulars he had extracted from a man at his club about Behrens. These were not many; but they were all to the credit of that gentleman, who had a good name in the City, and was reputed to be a man of means, supposed to have made some lucky hits on 'Change.

"A speculator?" said his wife, with cold disapproval.

"Most men speculate nowadays, when they've any spare cash," he said easily. "I would, if you'd let me, Mary."

He looked at her comically.

"Never," she said firmly. "I would almost as soon see you steal."

"Well," he said, with a smile for her rigid conscientiousness, "Behrens doesn't seem to have got bit. I'm told he lives in first-rate style and has a very handsome wife."

"A wife!" exclaimed Mrs. Drew.

"Doesn't that please you either?" said the Major, with a whimsical uplifting of his brows. "I should have thought the existence of a Mrs. Behrens rather pleasing to you, as it removes a possible lover, and makes that scheme of yours—"

"Pat, you are absurd!" cried his wife, cutting him short. "Scheme of mine, indeed!"

"Perhaps you will say it was mine," said the Major with resignation.

"Nonsense. Do be sensible. What do you think this Behrens comes here for? Do you think he is inducing the old man to speculate?"

"How can I tell?" he said, with easy unconcern. "He doesn't confide in me. I suppose if the old fellow likes that sort of amusement, he can afford it better than most."

The motherly heart that was thus beating with anxious thought for Tilly had some ground for its concern; but the troubles which she feared might gather about the girl's path were those with which a stranger feels loth to meddle. In her simple way she, who in other matters practised a just tolerance and liberal charity, looked with an almost Puritan severity on any lapse from the highest standard of honour. In her thoughts, speculation was but an interchangeable term for gambling; and it was her pride and her comfort that her husband had never yielded to the temptation to dabble in stocks and shares, which so often besets professional men who feel the pinch of a limited and fixed income. It was a narrow view, perhaps, but her husband respected her none the less for it, if he sometimes smiled at the inflexibility of imagination it implied.

Her guess had shrewdly touched on the right solution of Mr. Burton's changed behaviour. Those long talks which Tilly sometimes surprised; those talks studded with uncouth terms about which she rallied him, would long ago have enlightened a less unsuspicious person.

"Bulls and bears!" she would say.

"Do you want me to believe you are discussing natural history with Mr. Behrens?"

"Business, business," he would answer her good-humouredly. "What can a little lass like you understand about it?"

She understood little, but she dimly felt that this new passion for discussion, this new desire to be with his friend at home, or in the City, was growing in strength; and a vague alarm and uneasiness, which she could not formulate, assailed her. It rose with her in the morning, and if she forgot it in the whirl of her many engagements, it lurked there still undaunted, ready to claim her first moment of solitude.

She looked at Behrens with a new wonder, and something which might very easily become suspicion. What fascination had he exercised, which so potently rivalled her own? It was a much less complex influence than she supposed. He had but stirred the lust of gain that lies deep in every heart; the man must be simple, indeed, who supposes that the possession of large wealth satisfies all a man's cravings; it is Lazarus with his crust, after all, and not

Dives clad in purple, who is the most truly contented.

Behrens, with a cynic's knowledge of human nature, set about his work with skill; he listened, he sympathised, he did not even appear to advise; he allowed Mr. Burton to imagine that the suggestions and illuminations all came from himself.

There was something almost pathetic in the way in which the older man leaned on the younger; in the humility with which he made his awkward, stumbling confessions. The wealth which had seemed so colossal in Lilliesmuir, shrank to smaller proportions in London. He was still rich, very rich; but he had found that there was something his wealth could not purchase. That was a hard moment. Face to face for the first time with people to whom the ways of society were a fixed tradition, a doubt had come to mar his supreme satisfaction; a doubt which deepened as the days went by, and finally became a constantly galling wound to his pride.

His fellow boarders—though he could have bought them ten times over—showed no amazed appreciation of his wealth; they were good-natured, and would have willingly tolerated and made the best of him, and even found applause for his anecdotes in the smoking-room, but they seemed to think so many other things of deeper importance than money.

"That writing-fellow talks as if books were the only things worth living for, but the writing of them seems to be a poor enough trade," he said with some bitterness. "I'm told he can't make enough to keep a decent coat on his back, and yet he turns up his nose at me! And the young chap—he hangs about his club all day, and think himself mighty clever for doing it. As for the Major," his tone grew more savage, possibly because the Major had shown a readier willingness to be friendly than the others, "any fool can be a Major, but it takes something more than a fool to make the pile I've made!"

And yet, if money would not buy social distinction, what else had he to barter with?

"It's all for the little lass," he ended, with a sudden ashamedness; and then he hinted that, if his presence was to influence her chances adversely, he would take himself off to some remote distance, leaving his "pile" in her keeping. She was pretty enough and quick enough, and she knew about books and things—he thus

vaguely summed up the demands of the polite world: they would not despise her.

It was after one of these outpourings that he first saw a glimpse of an alternative less harsh than self-imposed banishment. No doubt the seed of this idea was deftly sown; but he believed it to have sprung unaided from his brain. This idea was to double his wealth, that was all; the world drives a pretty sharp bargain with the newly rich nowadays, but there is a point where it gives in, and becomes almost servile, where before it was haughty.

Behrens laughed and said there were ways—safe ones—of doubling even a big store; better ways than letting it lie in a Scotch Bank, even if you got current and deposit interest.

"What are the best investments?" Uncle Bob asked eagerly.

Behrens mentioned with a grave face, "Mortgages on freehold lands; good ground rents; and Consols; but if you think of dabbling in Consols, you should get a broker to watch the market for you. It's an odd thing," he added with careless irrelevance, "that the most successful operators in stocks are men who are quite unused to City life."

It was after this, that in a half accidental manner he took his friend to the City, making jocular apologies for its prosaic rush and hurry. They strolled into the office of a broker, happy in the possession of numerous clients; and there, for the first time, Uncle Bob heard the slang phrases that were soon to have a deeper fascination for his ear; there, too, he first saw the marvel of the tape clicking out industriously its tidings of good or evil.

He stared at first uncomprehendingly.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"It telegraphs the prices from the House," Behrens explained. He took it in his hand, as it kept falling to the ground. "Consols for money," he read, "100 $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{7}{8}$."

Mr. Burton took a chair, and gazed at it with a strange absorption, as it delivered its message with the indifference of fate. "Great Westerns," so much; "Districts," "Midlands," "Grand Trunk;" and as he watched the faces and heard the talk that murmured round him, his sluggish pulses were stirred and his eyes shone.

Behrens, glancing at him while he chatted easily with his friends, saw that the germs of the fever had already been sown.

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